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THE BACTRIAN INSCRIPTIONS AT KARA TEPE

1. The excavations of the Buddhist cave monastery at Kara Tepe carried by Professor B. Y. Staviskiy presented Iranian studies with the most important find of Bactrian inscriptions so far. This statement does not affect, of course, the vital importance of the Great Bactrian inscription found at Surkh Kotal, which will remain for a long time — perhaps for ever — the basic and most reliable source for the decipherment and understanding of Bactrian language. But the quantity, content, character and chronological position of the Bactrian inscriptions at Kara Tepe enlarge the knowledge of Bactrian epigraphy and history to a greater degree than any other epigraphic find before.

For the privilege to study and to interpret these inscriptions I should like to express my best thanks to my friends Professor V. A. Livshits and Professor B. Y. Staviskiy who placed their photos and drawings at my disposal and also gave me valuable support by their observations, criticism and informations about some details and finds of the excavations. Professor V. A. Livshits investigated the Bactrian inscriptions at Kara Tepe at the site on two occasions and he friendly communicated his results to me. With joint efforts we studied thoroughly almost all inscriptions, two major ones (B-7 and B-11) as well as some parts of B-5 separated from the walls of Kara Tepe and brought into the Hermitage in original too.

2. In view of the great number of the inscriptions, now I can only give a general preliminary report about their text, content and historical importance. The Bactrian inscriptions at Kara Tepe consist of two distinctly separated groups. The first of them only comprises 5 inscriptions written with ink on the surface of pots. This first group was found together with Kharoṣṭhī and Brāhmī inscriptions in cave complex No. 1. On the basis of the letter forms, the Indian inscriptions can be dated to the period of the Great Kuṣāṇas. Surely, the Bactrian inscriptions are also to be dated to the same epoch. The character of script and the unconnected letter forms fully support this dating.

From among the 5 Bactrian inscriptions 4 are fragmentary, while the 5th one has been preserved completely. Consisting of a Brāhmī — Bactrian bilingual text to be published by Professor V. A. Livshits and Miss T. V. Grek in the volume Kara Tepe III, the latter one proves that these Bactrian inscriptions on pottery represent records of proprietors or perhaps those of donors who were Buddhist monks living at Kara Tepe. To illustrate the character and content of these inscriptions I refer to the restored text of the record treated by me in the volume Kara Tepe II. Its text runs as follows:

E[IAO CIAO A]BO ZAXΦAIO BAY[AIO]

Th[is pot is the present of the monk So-and-so, which] should be used for mail!.

The forms *ZAXΦAIO* and *BAY[AIO]* in this inscription are of peculiar interest. *ZAXΦAIO* can be traced back to an OIr. form **jaxšva-hyā*- 'mail' while *BAY[AIO]* represents the 3rd person singular conjunctive of the verb *BOO-/BAY*- 'to be'.

3. The other group of Bactrian inscriptions at Kara Tepe came to light in cave complex No. 2. These records represent wall inscriptions and their number exceeds one hundred. They were scratched into the wall surface and are written in the Late Bactrian cursive script. Taking into consideration the late form of Bactrian script used in these inscriptions, we have to date these records to a much later period than those written on pottery.

Because of the hardly legible continuous cursive script and the fragmentary state of almost all inscriptions, the reading and interpretation of these texts encounter great difficulties. Thus, in spite of my efforts some uncertainty in establishing and restoring their texts still remained. Even to fix the exact number of the inscriptions was hardly possible up to the present. At first it seemed as if we have only to do with 11 inscriptions. Later, however, it appeared that most of these inscriptions actually represent whole epigraphic complexes containing from 3 to 25 separate records.

In some cases even the testimony of the photos proved to be fallacious. On the basis of a photo of small size, at first I was able to discover only one inscription on a wall surface. Later, by the help of better photographs I could distinguish 22 lines written on the same wall surface. Afterwards, I succeed to reconstruct the development of this epigraphic complex in the following way (the numbering of the inscriptions refers to the volume Kara Tepe II).

At first the central part of the wall surface was used to scratch in inscriptions. This fact can clearly be established by the accumulation of inscriptions on this part of the wall surface. Accordingly, inscription No. 50 containing the name of «Lord King Ōromazdo» seems to be one of the oldest records in this epigraphic complex. Later, as the new visitors wanted to scratch in their own inscriptions, they probably scraped off the

wall surface. This assumption well explains that circumstance that the more recent inscriptions are scratched in deeper as the older ones. By their position the inscriptions of the two Varhrāns, the Sassanian Vice-roys, are proved to be later than that of Lord «King Ōromazdo».

At a later period the upper and lower parts of the wall surface were also used for inscriptions. The records containing the date «Regnal year 405» could be scratched on the wall at that very time. Last, as the whole wall surface was already inscribed, the latest visitors preferred again to use the central part of the wall surface and they superscribed inscription No. 36 on inscription No. 53. As from this context it becomes clear that inscription No. 36 represents the latest record on this wall surface, the date of the latter inscription is most likely to be interpreted as «Regnal year (4)35». Thus the epigraphic complex B—10 elucidates the history of the Kara Tepe cave monastery at Sassanian times to a certain extent.

4. All wall inscriptions deciphered and interpreted so far represent records of visitors who came to behold the cave complexes there. As exact parallels to these texts the MPers. inscriptions at Persepolis, those in the synagogue of Dura-Europos as well as those at Kanheri can be referred. To characterize the general type of the wall inscriptions I quote No. 9. Its text runs as follows:

KAAAO MAAO ΓAAO PAMANOZAAO TA MAAO ZAC[TO]

«When Rāmanozādo came here, then he pray[ed] here».

This general type of the records can be enlarged by different complements. Thus, instead of *KAAAO* 'when' a date can occur. The adverb *MAAO* 'here' can be replaced by the expressions *CAAO ΓABO* or *CAAO ΓAΦO* 'Hundred Caves' which obviously represent the name of the site at Sassanian times. Last, sometimes the term *ZACTO* 'he prayed' is expounded by a detailed expression.

To illustrate the dating formula I quote No. 35:

XPAO AE TAAO BAPTO OAO MIPA[N]O OAAAGO ZA[CTO MAAO]

Regnal year (4)35. At that time Barγo and Mirāno the guide pra[yed here]».

As an example for the denomination of the site No. 62 can be referred:

[N.N.OA]'O' qIPAGO MAFO [OAO AM]OPAAAO CAAO ΓAΦO AΓAAO

«[So-and-so and] Širayō the magus [and Am]ordādo came to the 'Hundred Caves'».

Another variant of the same type (No. 27) runs as follows:

[N.N.O]AO DOCAAO ΓAAO ABO AAOΓABO OAO ABO KAPA[N]O [MAAO O]AO ABO OICAAO AYPANO KAPANANO

«[So-and-so a]nd Šosādo came to the cave complex and to the building [here a]nd to the entrance of the evil buildings».

As to the detailed expression of the prayer No. 26 can be quoted:

[BAIO XOAAHO OA]PAYAPANO KAO BAYAAO

«[The Lord King Va]raharāno may be a hero!»

Besides, there exists a whole set of other variants. Thus, *e. g.* No. 29 runs as follows:

MAOMAPAO KAPANO [v] 'M'A[A]O NOK[I]F[A]O

«Mā(h)omardo beheld the building here».

From the view-point of Bactrian vocabulary the new words occurring for the first time at Kara Tepe as *e.g.* CAAO 'hundred', TABO and TAO both for 'cave', TAAO beside ATAAO 'came', KAPANO 'building', AOTABO 'cave complex', ZACTO 'prayed', ZOYAO 'call, prayer' (somewhat uncertain), XBAO 'regnal year', AYPO (or AYPANO) 'evil', KAO 'giant, hero', OITO 'hero', OICAO 'entrance' (somewhat uncertain), NOK[I]P[A]O 'beheld', OAAAO 'guide', BAYAAO 'may be' etc. are mostly to be welcomed. As to the grammatical structure of Bactrian the genitive plural KAPANANO and the conjunctive form BAYAAO are especially noteworthy.

5. Without doubt the great number of Bactrian records occurring on the wall surface in the corridors of cave complex No. 2 at Kara Tepe requires a historical interpretation. Beside the quantity of inscriptions it is also striking that among the caves excavated at Kara Tepe so far, it is only cave complex No. 2 the walls of which were inscribed with Bactrian inscriptions. On the basis of the Prakrit and Bactrian inscriptions of Buddhist character written on pottery the conclusion presents itself that Kara Tepe was a flourishing Buddhist cave monastery, a common center both of the Mahāsaṅghika and of the Sarvāstivāda schools during the Kuṣāṇa Age. Contrary to the inscriptions written on pottery the Bactrian records discovered in cave complex No. 2 are obviously of Zoroastrian character. This fact clearly comes out from the Zoroastrian names, the occurring of the term «magus» and the whole tenor of the inscriptions. But Zoroastrian records in a Buddhist monastery are hardly imaginable, and the content of the discussed wall inscriptions obviously speaks for the favour of the assumption that the Kara Tepe buildings ceased to be a Buddhist sanctuary before the wall inscriptions came into being. The latter texts mention the sanctuary only as «Hundred Caves» or «evil buildings», *i.e.* the visitors regarded the site no more as a Buddhist monastery but — as the phrase «evil buildings» used by them proves — being not unaware of the past of the caves they considered them as the dwellings of the dēvs.

Accordingly, before the period represented by the Bactrian wall inscriptions the Buddhist monks must have been expelled from Kara Tepe and the caves and buildings ceased to be a Buddhist religious center.

Perhaps this event could be brought into connection with the Sassanian conquest of Bactria, when apparently Surkh Kotal, too, was devastated. The fate of Surkh Kotal and that of Kara Tepe were, however, very likely different. Surkh Kotal was the religious center of the Kušāna dynasty, it is, therefore, easy to understand, if it was destroyed by the Sassanian army in 233 A. D. But in the case of Kara Tepe a similar reason did not exist and even if it was conquered during the same campaign of Arda-χšahr as Balχ and Surkh Kotal were taken, it hardly suffered any damage at the time of the tolerant religious policy of the first Sassanian kings.

6. But it is a well-known fact that a great change in the religious policy of the Sassanians took place during the reign of Varhrān I and of Varhrān II. Under the leadership of Kirdēr, the *moybadān moybad*, a severe persecution of all foreign religions began on the territory of Iran. This event can best be illustrated by the words of Kirdēr himself. The following passage is quoted from his inscription Kirdēr KZ: «And the teaching of Ahriman and the dēvs disappeared from the Empire and no belief in it was kept and Jews, and Buddhists, and Brahmins, and Nazaraeans, and Christians, and Muγdays, and Manichaeans were annihilated within the Empire and the idols were destroyed and the caves of the dēvs were devastated and transformed into the house and seat of the gods». Taking into consideration that the cave monastery at Kara Tepe was one of the most important centers of Buddhism in Bactria, there can be hardly any doubt that it was destroyed about 275 A. D. during the persecution of the foreign religions organized by Kirdēr.

Since within the Sassanian Empire Buddhism was mainly represented in Bactria, the term *šmny* 'Buddhist monk' used by Kirdēr in his inscription may denote in the first place the Bactrian Buddhists and among them the monks of Kara Tepe. The phrase *glsty ZY ŠDY'n* 'cave of the dēvs' still more clearly refers to the Buddhist cave monastery at Termez. Such cave monasteries belonged to a rarely occurring type of religious buildings in Buddhist Eastern Iran, thus it is very likely that behind this expression of the inscription Kirdēr KZ an immediate reference to the cave monastery at Kara Tepe is hidden.

Since the text of Kirdēr explicitly emphasizes that «the caves of the dēvs were devastated and transformed into a home and seat of the gods» this connection of the inscription Kirdēr KZ with the fate of the Buddhist cave monastery at Kara Tepe also involves — as I pointed out already in May 1965 — the conversion of this building complex into a Zoroastrian fire-temple. In this context the reason also becomes clear why these Bactrian records of Zoroastrian character were only found in the corridors of cave complex No. 2. When the Zoroastrian clergy took possession of the cave monastery and a sacred fire was established, for this purpose the magi needed, of course, only one building complex. They probably chose cave complex No. 2 to establish the new sacred fire there. Accordingly, the Zoroastrian believers visited exactly this building to make their religious service there and to say their prayers and blessings. Performing their religious duties they probably beheld also the cave corridors which

they regarded as the former dwelling of the *dēvs* and they denoted it as «evil buildings» and they inscribed their names, occasionally also the dates of their visits and their blessings on the wall surface of the cave corridors.

7. On the basis of the afore-said it seems to be probable that the Zoroastrian believers began to visit the Kara Tepe building complex from about the eighties of the IIIrd century A. D. Accordingly, the earliest records could be inscribed on the wall surface of cave complex No. 2 at that very time. For the further history of the Kara Tepe cave monastery some evidence presents itself from the inscriptions. There are following relevant records containing some data of historical interest:

- No. 17 mentions the visit of «Varaharāno the Lord King». 20 gives the date «(3)97». 27 contains the blessing «[Lord King Va]raharāno may be a giant!»
- 36 presents the date «Regnal year (4)35». 40 contains the date «Regnal year 405». 50 mentions the visit of «Lord Varaharāno the King». 51 refers to the visit of «Lord King Ōromazdo». 53 commemorates the visit of «Lord King Varaharāno». 55 gives the date «Regnal year 405». 56 presents the date «Regnal year 405». 62 contains the blessing «[So-and-so the Lord] King may be a hero!».
- 63 refers to the visit of «Šīrayo the magus».

An inscription, not yet numbered so far, mentions the visit of «Lord King Pirozo».

These data proves on the one hand that the Sassanian Viceroy of Bactria often visited the cave monastery at Kara Tepe. The visits of at least four Kushano-Sassanian rulers: Ōromazdo, Varaharāno I and Varaharāno II and Pirozo were commemorated in the records. Perhaps one of the two Varaharānos also visited the «Hundred Cave» several times. Besides, the Bactrian high nobility bearing the title *BAIO* «Lord» also showed great interest in the cave monastery and often made his blessings for the welfare of the Sassanian Viceroy there. The visit of Šīrayo the magus represents the interest of the Zoroastrian clergy which probably played a great part in developing the ideas about the cave complex as the former dwelling of the *dēvs*.

8. In the records a whole set of dates appears: «Regnal years» (3)97, 405 (three times), (4)35. In connection with these dates the important question arises which era could be reflected by them. Taking into consideration the different eras used in Iran or Western India, *viz.* the Old Saka Era, Kaniska Era, Śaka Era, Vikrama Era, Arsacid Era, Seleucid Era, Sassanian Era, we must decide in favour of the Old Saka Era because the Seleucid, Arsacid and Sassanian Eras are to be left out of account for

chronological reasons, while the use of the Śaka Era and the Vikrama Era did not include the territory of Bactria. As regards the Kanīška Era, though it was used in Bactria it did not go beyond era-year 98.

If we assume the use of the Old Saka Era in the records at Kara Tepe, then on the basis of my chronological calculations the occurring dates can be converted as follows: (3)97 = 330 A. D., 405 = 338 A. D., (4)35 = 338 A. D. It should be added that the latest known dating according to the Old Saka Era is offered by the Kharoṣṭhī inscription from Skārah Dherī containing the year 399 = 332 A. D. which proves the use of this era still during the IVth century A. D. in Northwestern India where the omission of the Hundreds from the dates seems also to be a wide-spread custom. Perhaps the use of the Old Saka Era in the records of Kara Tepe can also be supported by the recognition that this era was probably reintroduced by Vāsudeva II in Bactria and possibly used in Surkh Kotal too.

9. On the basis of the relative position of the inscriptions the following relative and absolut chronology of the records commemorating the visits of the Sassanian Viceroys can be established. Inscription No. 17 attesting the visit of «Varaharāno the Lord King» seems to be earlier than No. 20 containing the date «[Regnal year] (3)97» = 330 A. D. Inscription No. 51 referring to the visit of «Lord King Ōromazdo» is again obviously earlier than No. 50 mentioning the presence of «Lord Varaharāno the King» which is inscribed partly on it. Both inscriptions are, however, earlier than Nos. 40, 55 and 56 dated to «Regnal year 405» = 338 A. D. Inscription No. 53 attesting the visit of a second «Lord King Varaharāno» was inscribed later than Nos. 50 and 51 but it is undoubtedly earlier than record No. 36 containing the date «Regnal year (4)35» = 364 A. D. It would also be tempting to assume that inscriptions Nos. 40, 55 and 56 presenting the date «Regnal year 405» = 338 A. D. are earlier than No. 53 mentioning the second Varaharāno, but the chronological relationship of the latter inscription to the quoted ones cannot be established with absolut certainty. As regards the inscription mentioning «Lord King Pirozo», it can only be said that being written somewhat higher than inscription No. 20 containing the date «[Regnal year] (3)97» = 330 A. D., it is probably to be dated to the period between 330 A. D. and 364 A. D. Thus we obtain following chronological table of the Kushano-Sassanian rulers occurring in the inscriptions at Kara Tepe:

Ōromazdo visited the «Hundred Caves» before 330 A. D.

Varaharāno I came to Kara Tepe later than Ōromazdo but similarly before 330 A. D.

His second visit (if we correctly identify the kings occurring in records Nos. 17 and 50) took place in any case before 338 A. D.

Pirozo beheld the «Hundred Caves» between 330 A. D. and 364 A. D.

Varaharāno II visited the cave monastery probably after 338 A. D. and surely before 364 A. D.

10. Apparently a further valuable chronological evidence is offered by a Middle Persian inscription occurring within the framework of epi-

graphic complex B—11. This short record written in Pārsīy contains a date which can perhaps be restored and interpreted as year 80 of the Sassanian Era. This date would correspond to 286 A. D. but because of the gap before the ciphers this testimony is not unambiguous. If the above reading and interpretation of the inscription proves to be correct, then we could regard this MPers. inscription as the earliest record in cave complex No. 2 which was inscribed not much later than the Buddhist monastery was transformed into a «seat of the gods». Be this as it may, in any case this inscription immediately attests the visit of Persian men of rank in Kara Tepe.

Thus the dated inscriptions throw light on the history of cave complex No. 2 within the limits of a period ranging perhaps from 286 A. D. up to 364 A. D. The last dated visit in the caves took places according to the testimony of inscription No. 36 in «Regnal year (4)35» = 364 A. D. It seems that shortly after this date the visits in cave complex No. 2 came to an end. Perhaps this event stood in connection with the secession of Bactria from the Sassanian Empire in the seventies of the IVth century A. D.